Chapter 7

Public Education and External Relations

7.1 In pursuance of our statutory functions, we develop community programmes for promoting public awareness and understanding of the work of our Office. More specifically, our efforts in public information and education aim to achieve the purposes below:

- to publicise our functions and services;
- to foster a positive culture of proactive service among public officers; and
- to promote a positive complaint culture in the public sector and in our community.

The outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in the first half of 2003 affected our scheduling of programmes. For health precautions, we revised the level and timing of group activities such as workshops, outreach talks and visits.

Public Information

7.2 We launched publicity from November 2003 to January 2004 through TV and radio broadcasts, messages on public buses and trains to remind the public what, where and how to complain to The Ombudsman. To achieve greater exposure, we placed more spots this year. To reinforce our public education efforts, we mounted roving exhibitions in nine public areas with high pedestrian traffic such as Mass Transit Railway (MTR) stations, shopping malls and public housing estates.

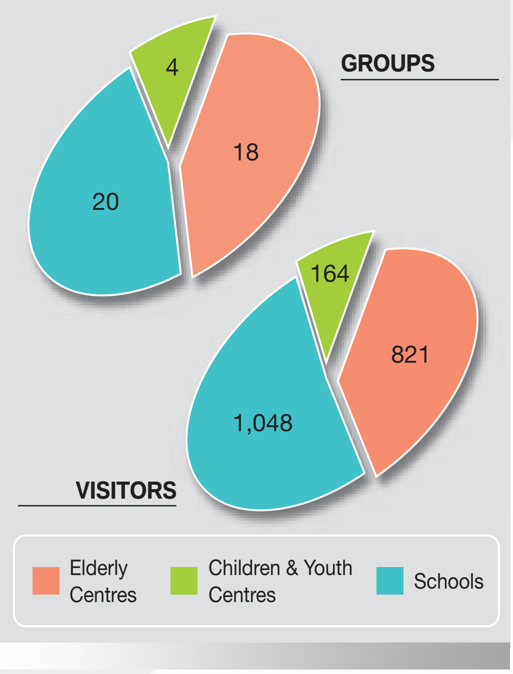
Resource Centre

7.3 Our Resource Centre houses our publications and a rich collection of Ombudsman-related literature. Over 200 new publications were added to our stock this year.

7.4 We welcome individuals and groups to the Centre. A group visit normally comprises a tour of the Centre, followed by a briefing and exchange of views with representatives of this Office. A total of 2,033 persons from 42 groups visited the Centre in the year, compared to 2,167 and 39 respectively in the previous year.

Fig. 7.1

Group Visits to Resource Centre



Information Materials

7.5 Our stock of materials go back some years and so from time to time we update our booklets, leaflets and CD-roms with interactive quiz games. Our publications on direct investigation and performance pledges have been reprinted with updated information. Others, on mediation service and "Tips for making a proper complaint",

are under review. Meanwhile, we are producing a new information video on our purview, functions and powers, to be ready by mid-2004. It will be shown to visitors at our Resource Centre and as an introduction for outreach talks.

7.6 Members of the public may visit our website *www.ombudsman.gov.hk* for information on this Office. There, they can browse through our publications, such as our Annual Reports, Ombuds News and details of our latest activities as well as The Ombudsman Ordinance. They can also test their understanding of this Office through the interactive computer game launched in May 2003. We update the website regularly so that our community can be kept abreast with our work and development.

Media Relations

7.7 After investigating a case, The Ombudsman may, in the public interest, publish a report on the investigation. In this connection, we anonymise selected cases for announcement and also publish our direct investigations to encourage good administration and promote quality service in the public sector. Summaries of our findings are carried in our periodical newsletter, "Ombuds News", for distribution to the media at The Ombudsman's press conferences about once every six to eight weeks.

7.8 This year, we announced the results of five direct investigations and six cases of complaints investigated.

Fig. 7.2

The Ombudsman at a press conference

Fig. 7.3

Press Conferences

22 May 2003

- Announcement of findings of direct investigation into enforcement of the Education Ordinance on universal basic education
- Declaration of direct investigation into prevention of abuse of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme

2 July 2003

- Publication of 15th Annual Report
- Announcement of findings of direct investigation into operations of the Integrated Call Centre
- Declaration of direct investigation into assistance provided by Home Affairs Department to owners and owners' corporations in managing and maintaining their buildings

21 August 2003

- Announcement of two anonymised complaints:
  - against Housing Department for ineffective supervision of property service company, resulting in prolonged occupation of venues in a public housing estate
  - against Home Affairs Department for maladministration in assisting an owner to obtain the ownership records of an estate free of charge

14 November 2003

- Announcement of findings of direct investigation into assistance provided by Home Affairs Department to owners and owners' corporations in managing and maintaining their buildings
- Declaration of three direct investigations into:
  - Education and Manpower Bureau's arrangements for surplus teachers in aided primary schools for 2003/04
  - handling of examination scripts under marking
  - enforcement action on unauthorized building works in New Territories exempted houses

18 December 2003

- Announcement of findings of direct investigation into prevention of abuse of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme
- Announcement of an anonymised complaint
  - against Food and Environmental Hygiene Department for impropriety in handling the withdrawal of an application for transfer of food business license
- Declaration of direct investigation into enforcement of the Building Management Ordinance

14 January 2004

- Announcement of two anonymised complaints:
  - against Housing Department for delay in processing a report on using a forged document to apply for public housing
  - against Buildings Department for impropriety in carrying out emergency works

4 March 2004

- Announcement of two anonymised complaints against Housing Department:
  - for delay in resolving seepage on the ceiling; and
  - for unfair treatment to the tenant alleged to cause the seepage
- Announcement of findings of direct investigation into handling of examination scripts under marking

Chapter 7

Public Education and External Relations

From time to time, The Ombudsman accepts invitations for interview by members of the media, print and electronic. They are important commentators on our work and provide important channels for public information and community feedback for our Office.

Meeting with Legislative Councillors

7.9 We maintain close contact with community leaders and organisations to enlist their support for our work. The Ombudsman attended meetings with Members of the Legislative Council in December 2003 and February 2004 to update them on developments and initiatives of the Office.

Meeting with Chairmen of District Councils

7.10 District Councils are a good avenue for The Ombudsman to take the pulse of the community. As before, with the assistance of the Permanent Secretary for Home Affairs, The Ombudsman met with the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of District Councils in March 2004. Exchange with these representatives from different districts offers a good opportunity to explain our functions and to obtain feedback on issues of community concern.

Assistance from Justices of the Peace

7.11 359 Justices of the Peace (JPs) have enrolled in our JP Assistance Scheme, launched in 1996 to enlist their support in promoting the ombudsman system by referring complaints and drawing attention to areas of concern or deficiencies in public administration. They take part in our functions and are thus kept abreast with our work and developments. During the year, we arranged two orientation visits for the JPs — the Hong Kong Central Library and the Hong Kong Observatory. Participants find such visits useful for insight into different facets of Government administration. We rely on them for warm support and for suggestions to improve our services and public administration in general.

Fig. 7.4

JPs visiting the Hong Kong Central Library

The Ombudsman Awards

7.12 The Awards seek to recognise professionalism in complaint handling and to foster a positive culture in the public sector. First introduced in 1997, they have been presented to public organisations displaying a positive and responsive stance to the investigations conducted by The Ombudsman. Since 1999, the Scheme has been extended to mark the efforts of individual public officers for their display of fairness, impartiality and efficiency in service and since 2000, also to public officers who contribute significantly towards improvement to public service through the handling of complaints over a sustained period of time.

7.13 All nominations are considered by a selection panel, chaired by the Deputy Ombudsman and comprising the two Assistant Ombudsmen and heads of the investigation teams and the external relations unit. Public organisations are assessed on the basis of their handling of complaints referred by this Office, their cooperation in responding to our requests for information and their commitment to improving the quality of their services, including implementation of The Ombudsman's recommendations. Public officers are nominated by their organisations as exemplary in achieving a good standard of customer service or in making significant improvement to the quality of complaints handling over a sustained period of time.

7.14 We hosted our annual Ombudsman Awards presentation ceremony in September 2003. A total of 21 public officers from 11 organisations were honoured on that occasion.

Fig. 7.5

Winners of The Ombudsman Awards for public organisation with The Ombudsman

Fig. 7.6

Winning Organisations for 2003
Transport Department (Grand Award)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
Post Office

Fig. 7.7

Individual Awards for 2003

Organisations	**Awards**
Customs & Excise Department	2
Electrical and Mechanical Services Department	1
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department	1
Government Flying Service	1
Hospital Authority	2
Housing Department	3
Immigration Department	2
Inland Revenue Department	3
Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Authority	2
Social Welfare Department	1
Water Supplies Department	3

Nominations for the awards in 2004 will shortly be invited.

Complaint Management Workshop

7.15 Our annual Complaint Management Workshop, originally scheduled for April 2003, was postponed to December due to SARS. The event aims at improving

professionalism in handling complaints, promoting a constructive view of complaints and cultivating a positive complaint management culture among public officers. We see complaints as opportunities for review and revision of procedures and practices, at times even revamp of policies.

7.16 Experts invited to share their experience this year spoke on the theme "Cooperation or Confrontation?". There were also interactive workshops for exchange of views on special topics, including feedback from participants on our work processes and practices. About 300 public officers attended the workshop although initial applications exceeded capacity considerably.

Fig. 7.8

Mr. Roger Luk, JP, Managing Director and Deputy Chief Executive of Hang Seng Bank Limited (right) speaking at the Complaint Management Workshop

Outreach Talks and In-service Training

7.17 Complaint handling is an integral part of public services. Most public officers, particularly those in the frontline, have to deal with complaints in the course of their career and are often subjects of complaint themselves. To meet their operational needs, we conduct talks and training for Government departments and universities. During the year, we gave seven talks including one on mediation. Senior officers from this Office introduced the work of this Office and answered questions on our jurisdiction and operations.

Institutional Liaison

7.18 Maintaining liaison with overseas ombudsman offices and international ombudsman organisations is important for the professional development of any effective ombudsman system. Regular exchange of ideas, methodologies and experience helps to enhance professionalism, cultivate relationship and open new perspectives for future planning. The Hong Kong Ombudsman is a member of the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) and a founding member of the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA). The Ombudsman participates actively in their activities.

7.19 The Ombudsman has been a Director of the IOI - representing the Australasian and Pacific Region - since 1996 (except 1999), and the Secretary to the IOI since October 2002. In September 2003, The Ombudsman attended the IOI Board of Directors' Meeting in Quebec, Canada and the 21st Australasian and Pacific Ombudsman Conference (APOR) of the Institute in Madang, Papua, New Guinea.

7.20 As Secretary to the AOA, The Ombudsman attended the Board of Directors' Meeting in Macau in October 2003 and the Sub-Committee meeting in Islamabad, Pakistan in February 2004.

Public Education and External Relations

Exchanges with the Mainland

7.21 We maintain regular exchange with the China Supervision Institute. Members of the Institute visited Hong Kong in December 2002 and The Ombudsman led a delegation to the Mainland in November 2003 for a week. We shared knowledge and experience about our respective systems and practices in monitoring public administration with our counterparts in Beijing, Guilin and Chengdu.

Fig. 7.9

The Ombudsman meeting Mr. Huang Shuxian, Vice-Minister of Supervision, Ministry of Supervision

7.22 From time to time, groups of Mainland officials and academics attend training courses in Hong Kong, which invariably include a half-day visit to this Office. We are also pleased to receive groups from local government departments and public organisations. Our directorate officers give talks to these visiting groups. During the reporting period, we received and delivered talks to 21 groups comprising 378 members.

7.23 In January 2004, The Ombudsman was invited in the capacity as an Ombudsman in Asia-Pacific Region to speak in an international conference organised by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia on “Good Governance”. The Ombudsman shared knowledge with, and offered professional advice on establishing ombudsman system to, the legislative and administrative bodies of the country.

7.24 Lists of visits to the Office and overseas conferences are at **Annex 15 & 16** respectively.

Thematic Household Survey

7.25 From time to time, our Office samples community feedback on our services through the Thematic Household Surveys organised by the Census and Statistics Department. The surveys serve to collect data on public awareness and perception of the work of the Office. The findings also enable us to gauge public expectations and to meet their aspirations for quality public administration. The reports also guide us in our public information and education strategies.

7.26 The latest survey was carried out during March to May 2003, three years after the previous completed in early 2000. Some 8,000 households were interviewed. About 72% of the respondents indicated that they were aware of the work of this Office, representing a 7% increase compared to the result of the previous survey. This survey also indicated that this Office was one of the main complaint channels of the public. The results of the survey were encouraging as they endorsed our public information and community relations strategies over the years.

7.27 They have also highlighted pointers for review of our strategy: those more educated and economically active tend to approach this Office; telephone is the preferred channel for lodging complaints; livelihood issues are most complainants' concern; many are not aware of our power to conduct direct investigation. We shall tailor the strategy for our coming publicity and operation plan accordingly.

7.28 The summary of findings is at **Annex 13**.

7.29 Meanwhile, a survey on the "State of Cohesion in Hong Kong" conducted by The University of Hong Kong (HKU) interviewed 1,054 respondents aged 18 or above from mid-August to October 2003. The findings from this study of public confidence in various institutions of governance and monitoring agencies were quite encouraging. Our Office ranked only after the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

Fig. 7.10

Mean Scores of Confidence in Institutions of Governance and Monitoring Agencies from HKU Survey

	Mean*
ICAC	8.15
The Ombudsman	7.47
Police	7.08
Judicial System	6.75

* From a range of 1 to 10: 1 indicating lack of confidence and 10 full confidence

7.30 In the coming year, we plan to conduct a client opinion survey to enable us to target our services better. We will continue to enhance the awareness of our presence among different sectors and information on access to our services.